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*Doctor Lathrop's*

DISCOURSE

BEFORE THE

*Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society.*

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AT a meeting of the Government of the *Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society*, on FRIDAY, *May 27, 1796.*

VOTED,—that the Hon. GEORGE R. MINOT, Esq. Rev. JAMES FREEMAN, and Doctor SAMUEL STILLMAN, be a Committee to wait on Doctor JOHN LATHROP, to return him the thanks of the Government for his Discourse delivered before the Society this day, and to request of him a Copy thereof for the Press.

A true Copy,

Attest.

WILLIAM ALLINE, Rec. Sec.

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GENTLEMEN,

I AM much honoured by the favourable opinion which the government of the *Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society* is pleased to entertain of the DISCOURSE which I delivered on Friday last, and by the obliging manner in which you have now communicated that opinion to me.

Influenced by the respect which I have for you, and the Society in general, I submit my own opinion, and will give a copy for the press.

I am, Gentlemen,

with the greatest esteem,

your obedient servant,

JOHN LATHROP.

BOSTON, *May 30, 1796.*



A  
DISCOURSE

BEFORE THE

Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society,

AT THEIR

*Annual Meeting,*

IN

BOSTON, MAY 27, 1796.

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BY JOHN LATHROP, D. D. A. A. S.

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Boston :

PRINTED BY SAMUEL ETHERIDGE.

1796.

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# DISCOURSE.

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I *TIMOTHY*, vi. 19.

LAYING UP IN STORE FOR THEMSELVES, A GOOD  
FOUNDATION AGAINST THE TIME TO COME.

AT the request of the government, and agreeably to an article in the constitution of the Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society, I am now to deliver a discourse, “ expressive of the advantages arising from charitable institutions.\* ”

MANY of the reasons occur, when considering the advantages arising from charitable institutions, which are offered to show, why men seek an acquaintance with men, and form the social compact.

THE weakness and the wants which the children of men soon experienced, led them to ask assistance of each other, and to form associations for mutual aid and defence. In those social agreements, it is either expressed or understood,  
that

\* Article VII.

that all the associates will not only make the general good, the object of their pursuit, but by particular attentions to such as may be under suffering circumstances, will endeavour to alleviate their troubles, and make them happy.

It is our duty, not only to seek the proper means to satisfy the *daily* wants of our families, and of those who look to us for assistance ; but nature and religion teach us to provide against future calamities. If the wise man who foresees evil, hides himself, wisdom will teach us to look forward to days of trouble, and prepare, as well as we can, to meet them.

It is evident St. Paul had his mind on a future world as well as the present, when he urged on his fellow christians, the exercise of charity and general beneficence. "Charge them that are rich, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy : that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate : Laying up in store, for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

GREAT



GREAT advantages of a moral, as well as of a civil and political nature may be found in Societies which men cannot expect while solitary and unconnected.

MEN united in Societies, contract an affection for each other : if the object of their meetings be honourable and benevolent, their conversation and labours will tend to establish benevolent and honourable principles in their own hearts. It is a common observation that men are known by their company. While combinations of the foolish and wicked, tend to increase their folly and vice, the virtuous encourage and support one another.

WE shall be influenced to support this charitable institution in particular, from a consideration that we may personally receive aid from its funds. But should we be so fortunate, as not to see our property consumed by fire, according to the course of things, in the world which we inhabit, we may be very sure, the provision we are now making, will be wanted for the relief of some of our brethren. As a still more powerful motive, we are taught by the holy scriptures, that God our heavenly father, will not forget those works of charity which are done in obedience to his will.

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WITH great propriety our attention may be given, a few minutes, to the particulars now mentioned.

THE performance of duty is easy, when we feel the combined influence of all the great motives which are suited to operate on the rational mind.

The good subject of divine government will obey, although he may not see the connection between his obedience and the reward : but considering the imperfection of our virtue, while in the present life, the performance of duty will certainly be made more cheerful and easy, by the assurance of a reward.

WE find within us a principle of self-love :— We first seek the means of our own comfort : we are next led to make provision for the comfort of our connections and friends.—Benevolence extends our wishes to the whole family of God; and religion raises in the charitable soul, a hope of immortal blessedness.

THE establishment of funds for the purposes which this Society hath in view, will require no great exertions. By contributing a small sum every year, the increase from the numbers, which  
we



we may reasonably suppose will join to benevolent an institution (in a country where great profits arise from the use of money) will, it is to be hoped, be equal to our wishes.

IN all countries, and in all cities, buildings are more or less exposed to fire : but the danger is greatest, other things being equal, where the buildings are most composed of combustible materials.

As our houses and other property are constantly in danger, and many of us cannot spare from a small income, enough to pay the ordinary premium of insurance, it is prudent, for so many as can with conveniency, to unite in Societies, where the joint stock, and united affection, may afford encouragement to all, and support to such as shall need particular assistance.

WHEN we lie down to sleep, we shall feel a degree of satisfaction in thinking, should the fire consume our property, we still have an interest in the affection, and in the funds of a society established for the relief of such as shall suffer in that particular way.

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THIS thought will be consoling when awakened from our slumbers, we hear the alarming cry, and behold the light of menacing destruction.— To think we have done what we were able, and what prudence dictates, to lay up for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, will be peculiarly consoling should it so happen, in the course of events, that our houses shall be consumed.

SHOULD we be so unfortunate, as to see the property, which with care and industry we had laid up for ourselves and for our friends, ascending in a volume of smoke and flame, and mingling with the clouds, it will certainly be a comfort to think, we have something left : We have a right in common with our associates, to a stock collected and improved for our use.

IT is indeed our happiness to live among people, who have been in the habit of giving aid to the unfortunate. To the honour of this town, it must be said, the inhabitants have done as much as could be expected, for the help of such as have lost their property, by the fires with which it hath been frequently visited.

BUT



BUT while our best stock under providence, remains in the bosom of an enlightened and humane people, it is prudent to lay aside a small part of our income, as a fund, on which we shall have a right to draw, should the calamity overtake us, which in times past hath overtaken many of our fellow citizens.

THE motive to aid the designs of this charitable institution, from a consideration that we may personally receive assistance from its funds, is addressed to our natural feelings, and will have an effect.

BUT should a kind providence protect our dwellings and our substance, from a destruction which waiteth indiscriminately, in darkness and at noon day, we shall feel the most valuable kind of pleasure, in thinking, that, from the sums which we have contributed, a foundation is laid for the comfort of some of our needy and distressed fellow creatures.

THERE is a luxury in doing good, for which the children of folly, and of sensual pleasure have no relish.—Could the money be saved, which is wickedly spent in pampering those appetites which are the most fatal enemies to the happiness of mankind,

mankind, there would be a sufficiency for the charitable purposes, which the benevolent have contemplated, but have not been able to effect.

IN as much as the purposes of this institution embrace the interests of all ranks and orders of people, it will not be unreasonable to expect that all ranks and orders of people will give it encouragement.

As it is doubtless within the compass of human ingenuity to find out more secure and advantageous coverings for our buildings, than those which have hitherto been in common use ; and also machines more convenient, or more powerful for extinguishing fires, every citizen will be willing to contribute a small sum, to stimulate genius, and reward such as shall give their attention to the subjects now mentioned.

THE exertions of ingenuity to guard against evils, and to increase the sum of rational enjoyment have been honoured and rewarded by the most celebrated nations of the world.

SOCIETIES for the encouragement of Agriculture, Commerce, and the useful arts were progressing towards high perfection among Europeans,



ans, before the dreadful war broke out which now rages on that quarter of the globe.

WE lament that for a time in France, *vandalism* directed its awful force against those monuments of human ingenuity which had been for a long time, admired by men of literature and taste : with the deepest sorrow we lament, that during that awful period, many who had done honour to themselves and to human nature, by their useful discoveries, were either executed at home, or driven from their families, and from their property, to suffer and die abroad.

BUT the political storm which has proved fatal to multitudes, and shaken the foundations of the most powerful Empires, is now passing over.—When at rest, the nations of men will again cherish the milder arts, and call forth the exercise of genius, not only to heal the wounds which are now bleeding, but to guard against future evils, and improve the sources of real enjoyment.

A CERTAIN degree of population and wealth must precede the establishment of Societies for useful improvement. Several ages after the settlement

tlement of a new country, the inhabitants will be necessarily employed in clearing the wilderness and subduing the soil. Their buildings must consist of the most cheap, and consequently of the most perishable materials. Not having property which they can risk, they dare not venture out of the safe and common path to make experiments.

AMERICA hath now arrived at a stage of population, and wealth sufficient to encourage inventions and labours, such as were not contemplated by past generations.

A PROPHET, before the American Revolution would have found but little faith, had he predicted that within the first quarter of a century, then commencing, permanent bridges would be carried over wide and deep rivers, which before were passed with difficulty and danger ; and that the produce of the interior parts of the country would, in a short time, become doubly valuable to many of the farmers, by the facility of water conveyance.

THE establishment of companies for the execution of arduous and expensive undertakings ; and of Societies to cultivate useful knowledge,  
and



and to encourage the efforts of human ingenuity, have brought forward inventions for the good of mankind, which at once please and astonish.

SUCH inventions, and the works which have been effected in consequence of them, to use the words of men, whom America and the world have delighted to honour, “ prefage an æra of still greater improvement ;\*” “ For inventions of improvement are prolific, and beget more of their kind.†”

THIS Commonwealth hath honoured itself by the encouragement it hath given to literary and charitable institutions, while it was a colony of Great Britain, and since it hath been independent.

BESIDES the University in Cambridge, established by the patriarchs of America, and which may be considered as the parent of all the literary institutions in our country,—The Marine Society; The American Academy of Arts and Sciences; The Society for Propagating the Gospel; The Humane Society; The Massachusetts Congregational Charitable Society; The Episcopal Charitable Society; The Massachusetts Charitable Society; The Medical Society;

\* A letter from the PRESIDENT of the United States.

† A letter from Dr. Franklin.

ciety ; The Agricultural Society ; The Historical Society ; The Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society, and the Society for the information of strangers, have received charters of incorporation ; and some of them are possessed of considerable funds. Besides those above mentioned there are several other associations for literary and useful purposes.\*

As a powerful motive to such works of charity and beneficence as are the objects of this institution, we are assured, God our heavenly Father will regard them favourably, and reward them.

SUCH works he encouraged, when he spake to his people, by the lips of his inspired servants, in old time saying, “ Cast thy bread upon the waters ; for thou shalt find it after many days. The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand.”

SUCH works were encouraged in the strongest terms by Jesus Christ. As he was the best teacher that

\* In this town there are 24 Fire Societies, consisting of about 30 members each.—As the Members of those Societies have received great assistance from each other in times of fire, it is to be wished more associations of the kind were formed.

The members of those Societies are bound, under certain penalties, to attend on their stated meetings, and to be furnished, each with two Buckets, two Bags, and a Bed Key.



that ever came into the world, he encouraged the best actions, and by the most engaging motives.

HE let his hearers know, the gates of heaven shall be shut against such as turn away from the hungry and naked, and refuse, when it is in their power to comfort and refresh them: at the same time he promised to the humane and charitable, who are friends to the friendless, who open their hands to feed the hungry, and to furnish needful supplies to those who have no resources, everlasting rest and happiness in heaven.

THE subject, you are sensible is far from being exhausted. Much more may be said, and much more will be said on successive returns of this anniversary, to point out "the advantages arising from charitable institutions," and from such associations of men, as have useful discoveries, improvements in arts and trades, and the general good of mankind for their objects.

THE calamity, against which, this Society was instituted, in some measure to provide, is a calamity to which we are all exposed. By contributing to the funds of this Society, we lay up  
for

for ourselves a good foundation, against the time to come.

IN addition to the motive arising from the expectation of personal aid from this Society, should we be so unhappy as to suffer by fire, we are excited to contribute, by the desire we feel to help our brethren, and by the promise of a reward given by our divine master.

MOTIVES of a more important kind cannot be presented to the mind of man.

IT will be happy, if by premiums, or other ways this Society shall be able to bring forward such improvements as shall render our habitations and store houses more secure than they now are, against devouring flames : but a complete security is not to be expected.

WE shall always be in danger, more or less, of losing our property by fire. People thus made poor, we must expect always to have with us : opportunities will offer to do them good.

THOSE who annually cast into the treasury, of this Society, the sum, which is a condition of membership, and those who are able, and who feel disposed



posed to make a more generous contribution, may rest assured they are promoting a good work.

THE motives naturally arising from the subject, will be sufficiently influential, without any attempts, by me, to enforce them.

By the exercise of charity to the afflicted and needy, and of beneficence to all men, we shall please God, and be prepared for the company of benevolent souls in Heaven: and when these earthly tabernacles shall fail us, and the houses which we now inhabit shall decay or be consumed, God grant we may be admitted to the everlasting abodes of the wise and good, where our employment shall be adoration, and praise, and love, for ever and ever,—AMEN.



Not shared they are promoting a good work.

It has been found that the  
necessity of having a  
physician will be required in some cases.  
In other cases it will be found that  
it is better to have a physician who  
is now in the field of work or who  
can be called upon at any time.  
The same may be said of the  
cases of the wife and child who  
are ill.

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